

The Grazyna and Kiejstut Bacewicz Academy of Music
in Łódź (Poland), 5 May 2026
SOUNDING LECTURE

“Porpora’s Workshop: Rediscovering the Art of Practical Counterpoint”

When studying practical counterpoint through manuscripts from the earliest Italian music institutions, one can easily feel overwhelmed by the sheer number of exercises and by the seemingly loose structure of the curriculum. Often, there is very little information to guide us in how these exercises were meant to be performed, or even how they were supposed to be approached in practice.

An investigation of partimento pedagogy therefore needs to consider not only the surviving partimento collections themselves, but also the materials that preceded and followed the study of partimento. Singing exercises, or *solfeggi*, can provide valuable context for understanding how the human voice was involved in pattern learning, imitation, and variation. Although partimento sources often preserve only the exercises given by teachers, student notebooks in written counterpoint offer important insights into how these materials were actually used. In particular, notebooks from the Neapolitan conservatories reveal much about the learning strategies employed by students as they progressed through their training.

This sounding lecture focuses on strategies for learning partimento by exploring the connections between solfeggio, partimento, and written counterpoint. Central to this investigation is the pedagogy of one of the most influential singing teachers and composers of mid-eighteenth-century Europe, Nicola Porpora (1686–1768). Through the study of newly identified teaching materials attributed to Porpora, we gain unique insight into the role of variation in the acquisition of practical counterpoint, especially through hands-on work at the keyboard.

Finally, the lecture will address aspects of variation and form in works by Porpora and by Joseph Haydn (1732–1809), who absorbed many of Porpora’s pedagogical principles while serving as his accompanist in the 1750s.

Peter van Tour